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# Texas Department of Health

## The Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health

March 11, 2004

### Hot Topics



#### Mobile dental units awarded

In January 2004, TDH announced the availability of three mobile dental units to be used by governmental entities to increase access to oral health services in underserved areas of the state. In response to a TDH "request for offer," eight applications were received, screened, evaluated, and scored by a panel of four evaluators.

The following governmental entities were awarded the units for a three-year contract period:

- **City of Austin** - will provide oral health care services to indigent populations in the Travis County area.
- **El Paso City-County Health Department**- will provide oral health care services to the indigent populations in the El Paso County area.
- **Brazos Transit District**- will provide oral health care service to a seven-county target area, including Brazos, Burleson, Robertson, Bryan, Madison, Washington and Leon counties.

The contract period begins April 1, and the awardees must take possession of the units within 60 days of the award notification. *For more information, contact Jann Melton-Kissel at 458-7111, ext. 2002 or e-mail [jann.melton-kissel@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jann.melton-kissel@tdh.state.tx.us).*



#### Transformation update

Following a series of public comment meetings in Harlingen, Arlington, Austin, Houston and El Paso, a proposed organizational structure for the new Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) was developed and received Health and Human Services Commission approval in late February. A DSHS Leadership Team, with members representing the three legacy agencies that will comprise the new department, has been formed to guide critical transformation processes and to advise the DSHS Program Management Office. *For more information, contact Debra Stabeno, Program Management Office, at (512) 458-7437 or e-mail [debra.stabeno@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:debra.stabeno@tdh.state.tx.us).*



#### Avian flu

The Texas Animal Health Commission announced Feb. 20 that some chickens on a commercial farm in Gonzales County tested positive for the H5N2 strain of the type A avian influenza virus. Subsequent tests of poultry flocks within a 10-mile radius of the farm have been negative. The strain is not the same Avian flu strain that has caused

human illness and deaths in Southeast Asia. There is no documentation that the H5N2 strain has ever caused human illness. *For more information, contact Eric Fonken, Zoonosis Control Division, at (512) 458-7255 or e-mail [eric.fonken@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:eric.fonken@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) site visits**

The State Coordinator for the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) Program and an SNS Program Services Consultant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are conducting evaluations and site reviews in each of the eight public health regions in February and March. The purpose of the evaluations is to determine the regional level of readiness to receive, distribute, and dispense SNS supplies in the event of a national emergency, in support of the State SNS Plan. *For more information, contact Mariah Ramon, Center for Public Health Preparedness and Response, at (512) 458-7695 or e-mail [mariah.ramon@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:mariah.ramon@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## **Disease Outbreaks/Investigations**



### **Influenza**

The flu activity level for Texas, for the week ended March 6, was “sporadic,” meaning there were isolated cases of lab-confirmed influenza in the state, but overall influenza-like illness activity was not increased. *For more information, contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Nosocomial outbreak investigations**

Epidemiology staff members in Region 1 have been involved in investigations of outbreaks of hospital acquired, or nosocomial, infections in Lubbock and Amarillo. Nosocomial wound infections in Lubbock, involve a hospital, long-term care facility and wound care clinic. Patient records and the facilities’ procedures and policies on dealing with multi-resistant organisms are being reviewed. Region 1 staff is working with the Lubbock City Health Department staff on the investigation. An outbreak of norovirus occurred in Amarillo involving a long-term care facility. The TDH laboratory in Austin isolated norovirus, and appropriate action was taken by the local health department to contain the infection. *For more information, contact Connie Lindley, IDEAS, at (806) 655-7151 or e-mail [connie.lindley@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:connie.lindley@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Invasive group A streptococcal disease**

From Dec. 1, 2003 to Jan. 9, 2004, TDH received 13 case reports of invasive group A streptococcal disease in Region 6/5 South, including reports from Hardin, Orange and Jefferson counties. The Region 6/5 South Epidemiology Program cooperated with the local health department and the local hospital in Beaumont, and the TDH central office in investigating. The investigation found no epidemiological links among the patients. Two health advisories were sent to alert local physicians about the situation and to encourage the reporting of similar cases.

Dr. Celine Hanson, TDH Regional Director, and Donna Evans, the regional information specialist helped the local health department develop a health advisory to educate the public about the disease. Since Jan. 10, TDH has received no reports of new cases of

invasive group A streptococcal disease from that area. *For more information, contact Huai Lin, Epidemiology Program, at (713) 767-3232 or e-mail [huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Animal rabies cases**

On Feb. 12, the Region 7 Zoonosis Control Program staff notified stakeholders in Robertson County of an increase in confirmed skunk rabies cases, with spillover into a domestic animal, in January and February. Notification was sent to the county judge, sheriff's department, Cooperative Extension Service, area veterinarians, and city halls or animal control agencies in Hearne, Calvert, Bremond and Franklin. Prior to this "rabies alert," a 4-H show sheep died of the skunk rabies strain. Five persons exposed to the sheep underwent the complete rabies prevention post-exposure series. The communities responded by notifying the public of the risks through the help of local media. *For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix, Zoonosis Control Program, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2451 or e-mail [beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Ban on specified risk material from cattle**

In January, in response to the first case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or "mad cow" disease in the United States, the USDA published rules banning certain materials from cattle slaughter for use as human food. The ban removes small intestines from all cattle from the human food supply. Small intestines from cattle (*tripas*) are used in some traditional Hispanic dishes. Other materials banned as food include skulls and vertebral columns from cattle older than 30 months of age. This ban affects other popular foods such as T-bone steaks and *barbacoa*, though these items still will be available if derived from cattle less than 30 months of age at the time of slaughter.

Immediately after the diagnoses of the first case of BSE, the USDA banned the slaughter of non-ambulatory cattle for food purposes. TDH notified all slaughter plants, including those that slaughter customer-owned animals under a custom exemption, that they may not slaughter non-ambulatory cattle nor process the carcasses of dead -- including farm killed and dressed -- cattle. *For more information, contact Lee Jan, Meat Safety Assurance, at (512) 719-0205 or e-mail [lee.jan@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:lee.jan@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## **Trainings/Conferences/Meetings**



### **International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease conference**

Austin was the host city for the 8th annual conference of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, North America Region. The conference, titled "Working without Borders to Stop TB," was held Feb. 26-28. Several smaller meetings related to specific TB issues were held in conjunction with the conference. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Bi-national public health preparedness and response forums**

A series of seven forums sponsored by the Texas Department of Health, the Mexican Ministry of Health and the United States-Mexico Border Health Commission will be held in the next few months. The purposes of the forums are: a) to gain a better understanding

of the Texas and Mexico preparedness and response plans for bioterrorism, infectious disease outbreaks and other public health threats and emergencies, and b) enhance the Texas-Mexico partnership and working relationships for improved coordination and collaboration in addressing health and safety issues along the border. *For more information, contact Francesca Kupper, TDH Center for Public Health Preparedness and Response, at (512) 458-7219 or e-mail [francesca.kupper@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:francesca.kupper@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Trainings in crisis communication held, planned**

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication training was conducted in Region 7 at the Central Texas Workforce Center in Killeen Jan. 26-27, in Region 11 at the Hidalgo County Health Department Feb. 19-20 and at the Corpus Christi-Nueces County Public Health District Feb. 23-24 and in Region 2/3 at the regional office in Arlington March 4-5. Participants included local health authorities, public information officers, spokespersons and other staff who would be called on to present information to the public during emergency situations. The class is designed to help in the planning and preparation of crisis communication materials and tools. It also includes an opportunity for spokespersons to train in an experiential “face the media” video activity.

Training is scheduled for the Laredo Extension Campus of the UT Health Science Center-San Antonio March 23-24. *For more information, contact Andrea Littlefield, External Relations, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 2916 or e-mail [andrea.littlefield@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:andrea.littlefield@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Project management training**

The TDH Bureau of Project Management (BPM) in the Associateship for Information Systems (AIS) is offering a catalog of project management classes based on international Project Management Institute (PMI) methodology. Though sponsored by AIS, this training is not limited to IT projects, and is applicable to any type of program project, including consolidation projects. Classes available include: PM 101 -- a two-hour overview available on request for four or more participants; a two-day workshop on applying project management, scheduled at least once a month; in-depth classes on PMI knowledge areas; project portfolio management; and a study group for those interested in pursuing certification as a project management professional (PMP). Visit the BPM site on the TDH Extranet: <http://extra.tdh.state.tx.us/pm/>. *For more information, contact Judy Sandberg, Project Management, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6262 or e-mail [judy.sandberg@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:judy.sandberg@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Civil right training modules for management**

The HHSC/TDH Civil Rights Office has created the Training & Information Module Series to offer ideas for preventing employee workplace complaints. With nine two-hour training modules developed, the Civil Rights Office lays out workable approaches to fair, equitable and legal civil rights and human resources management practices. The modules include Equal Employment Opportunity laws and other employment topics to arm supervisors and managers with practical information that can be used immediately to achieve a more productive work environment. *For more information, contact Robert Gomez, HHSC/TDH Civil Rights Office, at (512) 458-7627 or e-mail [robert.gomez@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:robert.gomez@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Refugee health training**

Staff members from TDH's Refugee Health Screening Program and local health department programs in Austin, Houston, Dallas and Fort Worth attended training offered by the National Libraries of Medicine (NLM) in Washington, D.C., Feb. 23-24, as a part of the Refugee Health Information Network Project (RHIN). Texas is one of three pilot states for RHIN, which is headed by the Center for Public Service Communications (CPSC). The project will provide training in accessing medical and cultural information, especially for refugee populations; establish a national Web site for refugee program information; and incorporate a list-serve for refugee health providers to communicate and share information. *For more information, contact Sam Householder, Refugee Health Screening Program, at (512) 458-7494 or e-mail [sam.householder@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:sam.householder@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **New TB Educational Center (TBEC) materials**

Newly created treatment guidelines flow diagrams, along with TBEC's eight other educational materials, were submitted and accepted for inclusion on the "TB Education and Training Resources" CDC-hosted Web page. The materials also may be accessed on the TBEC Web page ([www.tdh.state.tx.us/tcid/TBEC-Res-Patient-Care.htm](http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/tcid/TBEC-Res-Patient-Care.htm)). The new flow diagrams are: Assessing and Managing the Risk of Liver Disease in Treatment of Latent TB Infection; Evaluation of Pregnant Patient at Risk for TB; Management of the TB Patient at Risk of Hepatotoxicity. *For more information, contact Stephanie Ott, Tuberculosis Elimination Division, at (210) 534-8857, ext. 2227 or e-mail [stephanie.ott@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:stephanie.ott@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Tobacco Prevention and Control training targeting Hispanics**

A Tobacco Prevention and Control project in the Temple area is involving the faith-based community to reach Hispanics. The project has been introduced to area Catholic and Baptist churches with a high population of Hispanics. A training (English/Spanish) on tobacco prevention and control will be held in June for volunteers. Those volunteers return to their church communities volunteers make is to return to their church community and educate them on the health effects of tobacco use and the tobacco laws relating to minors. *For more information, contact Sylvia Barron, Tobacco Prevention and Control, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2350 or e-mail [sylvia.barron@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:sylvia.barron@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## **Administration**



### **HHS print shop nationally ranked**

Each year, *In-Plant Graphics* magazine reviews data from print shops located in government agencies, universities, manufacturing, retail/wholesale, insurance, and financial services organizations. The resulting ranking identifies the largest and most efficient operations. In 2003, HHS Printing Services ranked 28th (up from 31st in 2002) among the top 50 in-house print shops, and 7th among the top 15 government print shops. HHS Printing Services is managed by TDH and the Texas Department of Human Services. *For more information, contact Wanda Thompson, Associate Commissioner for Operational Support, at (512) 458-7720 or e-mail [wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Survey of Organizational Excellence (SOE)**

The University of Texas has notified TDH that our SOE employee participation rate was 61 percent this year, a new record. TDH had 58 percent participation in 2001 and 34



percent in 1999. A total of 2,533 surveys were completed this year. Result reports are still in production at UT. UT also worked with HHSC to design and administer a short survey on transformation communications that was sent to all 50,000 affected employees. *For more information, contact Robin Scott, Associateship for Operational Support, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6114 or e-mail [robin.scott@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:robin.scott@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## **Program Updates**



### **Bureau of Vital Statistics revising Texas birth certificate**

The Bureau of Vital Statistics (BVS) has begun the process of revising the Texas Certificate of Birth. The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) has provided a model certificate for states to use as a guideline in revising their certificates. There is significant analytical value in having a national vital statistics system in which all states collect the same or similar information.

Requests for input through a BVS website survey were distributed the week of Feb. 9 to BVS data users and local health departments and districts, asking for feedback on proposed changes to the Texas certificate. The survey results and other input received from stakeholders will be used to develop the new certificate. The new birth certificate will be implemented January 1, 2005. *For more information, contact Debra Owens, Bureau of Vital Statistics, at (512) 458-7366 or e-mail [debra.owens@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:debra.owens@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Texas Online Project for online license issuance and renewal**

The regulatory programs of the Associateship for Consumer Health Protection are participating in the Texas Online Project for the online renewal of occupational licenses, as mandated by Senate Bill 1152 (78th Regular Session). More than 100 license types are divided into tiers, for both license renewal and original license issuance. The first tier of renewals is projected to go live May 31. The overall implementation is projected to be complete in August 2005. *For more information, contact Jim Zukowski, Bureau of Licensing and Compliance, at (512) 834-4503 or e-mail [jim.zukowski@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jim.zukowski@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Promoting folic acid use through Texas county clerks**

The Texas Folic Acid Council, a project housed in the Perinatal Health Program and sponsored by the March of Dimes, in February kicked off a folic acid promotion campaign through the county clerks of Texas. County clerks were taught basic information on the benefits of folic acid, in general and specifically for prevention of neural tube defects, at the annual Bureau of Vital Statistics conference in December 2003. Folic acid promotional materials will be distributed to each county clerk to be included with information that is given when a couple obtains a marriage license. The goal of the campaign is to inform people that while they may not be ready to have a baby yet, it's a good idea to begin preparing for a healthy pregnancy by taking folic acid now. *For more information, contact Chan McDermott, Perinatal Health Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6663 or e-mail [chan.mcdermott@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:chan.mcdermott@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **The Emerging Infections Program (EIP)**

EIP is a population-based network of CDC and 11 state health departments, working with collaborators (local health departments, public health laboratories, clinical laboratories, infection control practitioners, healthcare providers, academic institutions, and other federal agencies) to assess the public health impact of emerging infections and to evaluate methods for their prevention and control. Texas became the 11th EIP state in October 2003. Plans are being developed to focus surveillance efforts on the Texas-Mexico border. The Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division and the Center for Public Health Preparedness and Response are working together on this project. In addition to many special studies, the focus of surveillance will be on food borne illnesses, the Border Infectious Disease Surveillance project and the Active Bacterial Core Surveillance project.

Dennis Perrotta is the principal investigator for the EIP. Linda Gaul will serve as principal investigator for food borne illnesses, and Neil Pascoe will lead the active bacterial core surveillance portion. Border Infectious Disease Surveillance is a continuing project led by Julie Rawlings. Other EIP sites are: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and Tennessee. *For more information, contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Hepatitis C initiative**

On Jan. 31, Gary Heseltine received notice that his abstract for a research paper presentation had been accepted for the Texas Public Health Association's 79th Annual Education Conference. The conference will be held at the JW Marriott Hotel in Houston, April 18-20. Dr. Heseltine will be presenting "Viral Hepatitis and Chronic Liver Disease in Texas." *For more information, contact Gary Heseltine, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Appropriate antibiotic use campaign**

As part of the continuing medical education efforts on judicious use of antibiotics, the Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division's Appropriate Antibiotic Use Campaign arranged for a CME/CNE presentation to be held at Sierra/Providence Hospital, Jan. 20, in El Paso. The presentation, aimed at reducing the prevalence of antibiotic resistant bacteria, was conducted by Sarmistha Hauger, Pediatric Infectious Disease Specialist, Children's Hospital of Austin. Dr. Hauger is a member of a Speakers' Bureau created, which is composed of infectious disease specialists from around the state who have volunteered to conduct these presentations. This is the third presentation that has been held since early fall. The others were held in Weslaco and Austin. *For more information, contact Olga Nuno, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [olga.nuno@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:olga.nuno@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)**

A survey of athletic trainers was launched in January to assess the number of high school athletes who have had MRSA, and a proposal was submitted through the Epidemiology & Laboratory Capacity (ELC) grant to follow up on this survey by doing active surveillance of MRSA in high schools next year. The Institutional Review Board is reviewing a proposal to determine carriage rates of MRSA in county jails. *For more*

information, contact Marilyn Felkner, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [marilyn.felkner@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:marilyn.felkner@tdh.state.tx.us).



### **Rotary meeting**

On Jan. 30-31 Rotary District Governors from Texas and Tamaulipas, representatives of the Binational TB Project Sin Fronteras, the TB Elimination Division and representatives of health officials in Tamaulipas met in Reynosa and McAllen to discuss a binational partnership for tuberculosis prevention and control. The Reynosa meeting included a tour of the Sin Fronteras TB Project, giving participants a firsthand look at the major needs of the program. In McAllen, participants discussed the barriers, needs and gaps in funding for binational TB activities and worked on a strategic plan for Rotary International to support TB projects across the border. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Hansen's disease funding award**

The Hansen's Disease Program received its annual award of approximately \$300,000 from the Department of Health and Human Services on Jan. 28, to continue funding outpatient medical services for Hansen's disease patients in Texas. The Hansen's disease program has been providing critical case management, medical services and medication to persons with Hansen's disease for more than 45 years. In Texas, seven clinicians currently provide services for more than 280. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Medical consultant selected for Texas HIV Medication Program (THMP)**

The Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention has hired Robert Kaspar as a physician consultant to provide clinical expertise about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Dr. Kaspar, who began working with the bureau Jan. 19, is board certified in internal medicine and infectious diseases and has an extensive background in the provision of medical care to people with HIV and other infectious diseases. *For more information, contact Linda S. Moore, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505 or e-mail [linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **THMP External Stakeholder Workgroup**

A conference call was held with members of the Texas HIV Medication Program External Stakeholders Workgroup formed to provide input to the HIV Medication Advisory Committee and TDH on implementation of cost containment measures for the medications program. One subgroup was formed to address the use of "medical status" as a criterion for eligibility. Another subgroup was charged with developing procedures for communicating the need to implement any proposed cost containment strategies to the community. The latter group subsequently recommended that three months notice of any cost containment strategies be provided to stakeholders and that any changes be subject to public consideration. *For more information, contact Debra Seamans, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505 or e-mail [debra.seamans@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:debra.seamans@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Regional Updates**

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## Region 1

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### **Prevent Blindness screening program**

Region 1 staff is working with the Prevent Blindness of Lubbock on a project to screen children for distance acuity. *For more information, contact Tommy Snell, Vision and Hearing Screening Program, at (806) 767-0477 or e-mail [tommy.snell@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:tommy.snell@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Healthy Lubbock Initiative**

Region 1 is working with the Healthy Lubbock Initiative through two community groups. The Focus on Kids taskforce is working to raise childhood obesity awareness among school groups and parents organizations. Several citywide events are being planned to promote physical exercise and good nutrition for children. The goal of the second group, the East Lubbock Coalition, is to prevent and control overweight and obesity among children in East Lubbock. A survey of East Lubbock families is being done to obtain information about the incidence and perceptions of obesity and related diseases. *For more information, contact Tricia Vowels, Texas Health Steps, at (806) 767-0414 or e-mail [tricia.vowels@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:tricia.vowels@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Future Search conference**

Public Health Improvement staff in Region 1 have successfully sponsored and completed their first Future Search Conference, held in Plainview in Hale County. Future Search is a unique way of bringing people together to create a shared vision for their community or organization. The planning committee was made up of a variety of individuals from community organizations, and the focus was to identify health-related needs and assets and to establish collaboration in the community. More than 50 people signed up to attend this conference. *For more information, contact Devon Casey, Public Health Improvement Program, at (806) 767-0309 or e-mail [devon.casey@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:devon.casey@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Region 4/5

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### **HIV/STD Program**

The Region 4/5 North HIV/STD program is supporting the application of the University of Texas Health Science Center, Tyler, to the Centers for Disease Control for the Public Health Conference Support Cooperative Agreement relating to a program on HIV prevention. The conference will significantly assist health professionals, educators and prevention staff on advancements in the diagnosis and prevention of HIV/AIDS. *For more information, contact Toni Kelley, HIV/STD Program, at (903) 533-5329 or e-mail [toni.kelley@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:toni.kelley@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Public Health Improvement**

The Public Health Improvement Program in Region 4/5 North is charged with building and strengthening public health infrastructure, concentrating on the 29 rural Texas counties that have no local public health departments. In fiscal year 2003, our region

conducted three, three-day Future Search conferences, covering six Texas counties. Each of the conferences concluded with vision statements, action teams, and plans for building capacity to carry out the essential public health services in the counties. As a result of the Future Search conferences, the counties have developed resource directories and are addressing concerns of bilingual groups. Newly formed teams have applied for grants and 501(c) 3 status. Other groups are working on a Community Wellness Center and a Mobile Health Unit to provide health services and public health education. Due to the success of Future Search during the past year, conferences are being planned for four additional counties this year. *For more information, contact Vicki Colston, Community Health, at (903) 533-5223 or e-mail [vicki.colston@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:vicki.colston@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Region 6/5

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### **State Emergency Response Team deployed to Houston**

The State of Texas deployed a modified State Emergency Response Team (SERT) to Houston at Ellington Field during the period of January 30 through February 2 for the NFL Super Bowl. The SERT maintained situational awareness and was prepared to fully execute duties as requested. Barbara Key was the Health and Medical Branch representative to the SERT for the TDH. Barbara provided the TDH briefing to the SERT on January 30 and ensured that TDH staff received instructions on Region 6 SERT Protocols and had access to the Emergency Operation Center manual and contact information for key agencies and stakeholders. During the Super Bowl event, TDH did not receive any Health and Medical Services requests for assistance. *For more information, contact Barbara Key, Public Health Preparedness Program, at (713) 767-3003 or e-mail [barbara.key@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:barbara.key@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Regional Review of the TDH Programs**

Dr. Celine Hanson, Regional Director and Greta Etnyre, Deputy Regional Director, hosted a regional review of TDH programs for State Rep. John Davis and his staff. On Feb. 24, on-site program overviews were conducted in the Seafood Safety, Meat Safety Assurance, Vector Control, General Sanitation, Public Health Preparedness and FQHC incubator programs. A broad review of all agency programs, including those not housed in Region 6/5 South, also was provided. *For more information, contact Greta Etnyre, Deputy Regional Director, at (713) 767-3019 or e-mail [greta.etnyre@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:greta.etnyre@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **National BioWatch Workshop**

The regional Epidemiology Response Team leader participated in the National BioWatch Workshop in Washington, D.C. Feb.10-12. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sponsored the attendance of a number of state and local public health personnel. Luis Gonzalez from TDH and representatives of local health departments and law enforcement agencies in Region 6/5 South participated in a panel discussion on the comprehensive response to a tularemia detection last October. *For more information, contact Luis Gonzalez, Epidemiology Response Team, Public Health Preparedness Program, at (713) 767-3343 or e-mail [luis.gonzalez@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:luis.gonzalez@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Region 7

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### **Texas Vaccines for Children update**

Last August, Smithville Independent School District's three school campuses became Texas Vaccine for Children provider sites and began offering vaccinations last fall. Through January, the middle school/junior high campus site, which includes grades three through eight, had given more than 400 vaccinations. Reports from the elementary and high school sites are pending. The district enrollment is 1,804. *For more information, contact Lynn Ponsonby, Immunization Program, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2433, or e-mail [lynn.ponsonby@tdh.tx.state.us](mailto:lynn.ponsonby@tdh.tx.state.us).*



### **Veterinary medical association meetings**

During November, December, and January, local veterinary medical association meetings in Austin, Belton, Brenham and Waco were attended for the purpose of sharing information on the 2003 West Nile Virus season, supporting veterinarians' training in bioterrorism preparedness and "staying in touch" with the local practitioners. *For more information, contact Beverlee Nix, Zoonosis Control Program, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2451, or e-mail [beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **'Yes You Can' campaign**

The Office of Tobacco Prevention and Control has been working with physicians and dentists in Bastrop and Smithville. We introduced our "Yes You Can" campaign tool kit for dealing with tobacco dependence. The kit contains materials for physicians and dentists and brochures for their patients. *For more information, contact Sylvia Barron, Tobacco Prevention and Control, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2350, or e-mail [sylvia.barron@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:sylvia.barron@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Region 9/10

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### **Advisory council for the elimination of tuberculosis**

The Regional Director represented the United States section of the U.S./Mexico Border Health Commission at a CDC tuberculosis elimination advisory council meeting. The council advises the director of CDC and the Secretary of Health and Human Services on TB elimination efforts. TB control among the foreign born and border populations is a high TB elimination priority. *For more information, contact Dr. Miguel A. Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail [miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Border bioterrorism response workshop**

The Regional Director participated in a bioterrorism response workshop sponsored by the New Mexico governor's office. U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona presided. Participants included senior executives from public health, the military and law enforcement and intelligence agencies from Arizona, New Mexico and West Texas. The

workshop included exercises on intelligence information gathering and analysis. *For more information, contact Dr. Miguel A. Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail [miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Health disparities border conference**

Regional Border Health staff attended a Health Disparities Conference sponsored by the University of Texas at El Paso and the University of Texas-Houston School of Public Health's Health Disparities Research Institute. The conference included presentations and panel discussions with national and border health disparities experts. Miguel Escobedo, TDH Regional Director, is on the Advisory Board of the Health Disparities Research Institute. *For more information, contact Blanca Serrano, Border Health, at (915) 834-7690 or e-mail [blanca.serrano@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:blanca.serrano@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Project Vida opens community health center**

U.S. Rep. Sylvestre Reyes presided over Project Vida's ribbon cutting ceremonies for their new Community Health Center. The center will help meet the social services and primary health care needs of a medically underserved community in northeast El Paso. Project Vida is receiving TDH Federally Qualified Health Center Incubator Project support. *For more information, contact Dr. Miguel A. Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail [miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Rural primary health care clinic opening**

The Regional Office is collaborating with Planned Parenthood of El Paso to begin the provision of primary health care services in rural Hudspeth County. Currently, there are no primary health care services in the county. Support for these services was secured through private grant funding. The community is providing the location for the clinic. *For more information, contact Dr. Miguel A. Escobedo, Regional Director, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail [miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Region 11**

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### **Oral Rabies Vaccination Program update**

During January, Region 11 Zoonosis Control staff participated in TDH's 2004 Oral Rabies Vaccination Program (ORVP). Laura Robinson and Greg Pye assisted with the South Texas ORVP for coyotes and the West Central Texas ORVP for gray foxes. *For more information, contact Dr. Laura Robinson, Zoonosis Control Program, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 632 or e-mail [laura.robinson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:laura.robinson@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Operation Lone Star Update**

The Harlingen Office of Border Health continues to represent Region 11 as the lead civilian agency in Operation Lone Star '04 planning meetings. The operation is a combination effort involving the U.S. Marine Corps, the Texas Army National Guard, and other military, public health and community organizations, that provides

immunizations and other health care services to the poor. Three treatment sites have been confirmed: 1) Garden Elementary, Brownsville, Cameron County; 2) E. Chapa Elementary, La Joya, Hidalgo County; and 3) Rio Grande City Middle School, Fort Ringgold Campus, Rio Grande City, Starr County. Treatment dates and hours will be July 26 - 30 and Aug. 2 - 5. *For more information contact Ramiro Gonzales, Office of Border Health, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 637 or e-mail [ramiro.gonzales@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:ramiro.gonzales@tdh.state.tx.us).*